

County wins national award for improving health

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United Way teams with partners on four initiatives that made a difference

By JONDI GUMZ

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SANTA CRUZ — Santa Cruz County is one of six communities nationwide to win the "Roadmaps to Health" Prize and \$25,000 from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Officials made the announcement Thursday at the foundation in Princeton, N.J. The other winners are: New Orleans, Cambridge, Mass., Fall River, Mass., Manistique, Mich., and Minneapolis.

The prize-winners, selected from a pool of more than 160

applicants, are being recognized for innovative strategies to help residents live healthier lives.

"This prize is a great honor for our United Way and for our community partners," said United Way of Santa Cruz County executive director Mary Lou Goeke. "It reflects the commitment our residents have to improve the quality of life for everyone who calls Santa Cruz County home."

The United Way led the local community partnership and cited four initiatives that came out of data from its annual Commu-



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Metro Transit employee Liseth Guizar hits the lunch room vending machine where half the items are termed healthy.

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nity Assessment Project:

■ A local universal health insurance plan, Healthy Kids, spurred coverage of 23,000 children in healthy Kids, Healthy Families and Medi-Cal as of December, according to Jordan Turetsky of the Health Improvement Partnership of Santa Cruz County.

■ Teen advocates in Jovenes Sanos, Healthy Youth, spurred the approval in 2010 of a Watsonville ordinance, the first in the nation, requiring new restaurants and transportation stations to offer healthy options. Restaurants falling under the new guidelines include El Herradero, Dona Rebecca Mexican Grill and El Miramar Sports Bar & Restaurant, which has new owners. United Way community organizer Kymberly Lacrosse said Jovenes Sanos has offered to work with the Metro transit district on a Snack-Fest to promote healthier foods and beverages in vending machines catering to employees.

■ A communitywide effort called Together for Youth led to creation of a "social host ordinance," giving law enforcement a new tool to address underage drinking at private parties. In 2011, city of Santa Cruz police visited 128 parties, issued 74 citations and 28 warnings, compared to 35 citations in 2010 while Scotts Valley visited 18 parties in the first nine months of 2011, issued 16 warnings, and issued two citations with four repeat offenders. Figures from the county and Watsonville were not available and Capitola does not have a social host ordinance.

■ The Sheriff's Custody Alternatives Program, created after 18 months of

community discussions, has provided more than 300 participants with education, employment, treatment, and social services as an alternative to incarceration to get their lives back on track. The Sheriff's Office reports the system has saved the county \$5 million.

"Congratulations to Santa Cruz County on receiving this prestigious national award for its work to improve the health of its residents," said State Sen. Bill Monning.

"By working together, our community is successfully addressing critical health issues through strategies that leverage public investment, private support and community participation," added county Supervisor John Leopold.

A panel of 15 reviewers included officials from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Environmental Protection Agency.

Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, president and chief executive officer of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, said she hoped the awards would shine a light of success approaches and inspire others to "take bold steps" to improve health in their communities.

The Roadmaps to Health competition is part of the County Health Rankings created in 2009 by the foundation and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. The rankings provide a snapshot of factors that influence health, and help community leaders identify areas where improvement is needed.

For a video profile of Santa Cruz County and the other prize winners, go to www.rwjf.org or www.unitedwaysc.org. For the health rankings, go to www.countyhealthrankings.org.

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